



# Mail

## Thoughts from an emergency room, Littleton, Colorado

Michael Ament spent the month of April in Denver, Colorado, completing an elective in emergency medicine. Suddenly, all of Denver was facing an enormous emergency: 12 students shot dead at a Columbine High School in the Denver suburb of Littleton. Dr. Ament wrote the following letter to friends and faculty at the State University of New York, his medical school in Buffalo, New York. He is now an intern at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver, and will begin his residency in neurology next year.

To the Editors,

The afternoon of the shooting, ironically, I was not scheduled to work in Emergency. I was approaching my last day—my last 10 hours—of medical school. When my wife, Julie, and I heard about the shootings, we reacted like everyone else in the community—with shock, a sense of helplessness, and a deep need to do something.

Julie and I did what many others did. We went to the Light of the World Catholic Church, where the survivors were gathered, and we helped. Nothing glamorous, just setting up tables, chairs, food, drink; pointing the way to the restrooms; and coordinating donations. At least it was something. It could never be enough.

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The next day, support gathered and became more organized. As the students and their families grieved, there was less and less

for strangers to do, and yet the pain was greater and greater. Our small contribution was to arrange for the Colorado Humane Society to bring out the puppies.

The reaction, frankly, was stunning. Children and adults alike cuddled and played with the puppies. More tears than I've ever seen. These little animals provided what so many people with so much talk could not—a crack in the armor and a chance for catharsis.

Perhaps part of the lesson is that there is always room for unconditional love; there is always hope in a new beginning. That was a pretty good lesson to learn on my last day of formal medical education.

The community of Denver pulled together in one of the most fantastic displays of compassion and action that anyone could ever imagine. And amidst the anguish, we have seen more acts of selflessness, heroism, and kindness than we ever imagined possible. Many have been broadcast on the news, but many others occurred without fanfare: one person at a time, helping one person at a time, over and over and over.

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